

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY QUITO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7536

INFO AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 QUITO 1440

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT,PINR,EC

SUBJECT: CAMPAIGN UPDATE

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: FOLLOWING A LULL AFTER THE FEBRUARY 20 ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE ELECTIONS LAW, PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNING IS NOW ONCE AGAIN AT FULL FORCE. SIXTO DURAN-BALLEN (FRENTE NACIONAL CONSTITUCIONALISTA-FNC) AND FRANCISCO HUERTA (LIBERALS) HAVE FORMALLY OPENED THEIR CAMPAIGNS IN THE PAST TWO WEEKS. DIVISION WITHIN THE LIBERAL PARTY AND THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY FROM THE FNC HAS RAISED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE COHESIVENESS OF THE POLITICAL BASES OF THE TWO LEADING CONTENDERS. THE OTHER TWO ANNOUNCED CANDIDATES, RODRIGO BORJA (IZQUIERDA DEMOCRATICA) AND ABDON CALDERON (FRA) ARE CONTINUING THEIR ACTIVE CAMPAIGNS AND ARE MAKING EFFORTS TO INSCRIBE THE APPROXIMATELY 30,000 PARTY MEMBERS THAT THE NEW ELECTIONS LAW REQUIRES BEFORE A CANDIDATE CAN APPEAR ON THE OFFICIAL BALLOT. OTHER GROUPS ARE IN THE PROCESS OF DETERMINING THEIR ACTIONS. KEY AMONG THEM IS ASSAD BUCARAM'S CFP, WHOSE FINAL DECISION AS TO HOW IT WILL PARTICIPATE IN THE UPCOMING POLITICAL PROCESS IS STILL PENDING. END SUMMARY

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2. PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNING HAS PICKED UP FOLLOWING A SHORT LULL AFTER THE RELEASE OF THE NEW ELECTIONS LAW FEBRUARY 20. LIBERAL CANDIDATE FRANCISCO HUERTA LAUNCHED HAS CAMPAIGN IN THE NORTHERN PROVINCE OF CARCHI FEBRUARY 25 IN THE FACE OF WELL PUBLICIZED PERSONALISTIC DIVISIONS WITHIN HIS PARTY. THE PICHINCHA (QUITO) PARTY DIRECTORATE HAS SUFFERED DIVISIVENESS AND HUERTA'S

RIVAL FOR THE NOMINATION AT THE RECENT PARTY ASSEMBLY, FORMER QUITO MAYOR JAIME DEL CASTILLO, HAS DISAFFILIATED AND IS PUBLICLY MENTIONED AS THE POSSIBLE STANDARD BEARER FOR CARLOS JULIO AROSEMENA'S PARTIDO NACIONALISTA REVOLUCIONARIO(PNR). AROSEMENA'S CANDIDACY WAS TORPEDOED BY THE NEW ELECTION LAW'S PROHIBITION AGAINST PRESIDENTIAL REELECTION.

3. RODRIGO BORJA OF THE IZQUIERDA DEMOCRATICA(I.D.) AND ABDON CALDERON OF THE RADICAL ALFARIST FRONT (FRA) CONTINUED THEIR ACTIVE CAMPAIGNS WITH THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THEY (BUT NOT SIXTO DURAN-BALLEN AND HUERTA), BEING THE CANDIDATES OF POLITICAL PARTIES WHICH HAVE NOT ACHIEVED OFFICIAL RECOGNITION, WOULD HAVE TO PRESENT LISTS OF PARTY AFFILIATES TALLING APPROXIMATELY 30,000 NAMES IN ORDER TO APPEAR ON OFFICIAL BALLOTS. BORJA'S ID IS NOT EXPECTED TO HAVE A MAJOR PROBLEM WITH THAT FIGURE, BUT MANY POLITICAL OBSERVERS THOUGHT THAT SUCH A REQUIREMENT WOULD MEAN THE END OF CALDERON'S EFFORT. HOWEVER, CALDERON ANNOUNCED IN GUAYAQUIL MARCH 6 THAT HE HAD REACHED THE REQUIRED FIGURE IN LESS THAN A WEEK AND PRESENTED AFFILIATES' LIST TO THE PRESS MARCH 7. IF CALDERON CAN BE BELIEVED THE 30,000 SIGNATURES IS IMPRESSIVE FOR THE FRA AND MAY INDICATE GREATER SUPPORT FOR CALDERON THAN HAS BEEN ESTIMATED.

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4. PARTIES THAT TO THIS POINT HAVE ANNOUNCED NO PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE ARE REPORTEDLY ATTEMPTING TO DEFINE THEIR DIRECTION. THE GROUP OF FOUR (THE UNION REPUBLICANA OF EDGAR TERAN, THE PONCISTA FRONT OF PABLO DAVALOS DILLON, THE VELASQUISTAS AND THE PNR OF AROSEMENA) HAVE BEEN IN CONVERSATIONS, BUT APPARENTLY NO JOINT ACTION HAS BEEN DECIDED UPON AT THIS POINT. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, THE VELASQUISTAS WILL DECIDE THIS WEEK WHETHER THE PARTY SHALL NOMINATE ITS OWN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. THE POPULAR DEMOCRACY PARTY (CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS AND PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVES) CONTINUES TO FIGURE IN RUMORS AS POSSIBLE ALLIES OF THE LIBERALS OR FADI, THE COMMUNIST PARTY LED FRONT.

5. THE VELASQUISTAS FRAGMENTED INTO SEVERAL GROUPS WITH LITTLE HOPE OF REUNIFICATION NOW THAT IT IS CERTAIN THERE WILL BE NO VELASCO CANDIDACY, ARE TRYING TO SALVAGE SOME LEVERAGE. JUAN CARLOS FAIDUTTI HEADS THE FORMAL PARTY STRUCTURE AND THERE ARE RUMORS FROM QUALIFIED SOURCES THAT HIS GROUP WILL SUPPORT THE PRESIDENTIAL AMBITIONS OF SIXTO DURAN-BALLEN. ALFONSO ARROYO, RECENTLY DEPOSED DIRECTOR OF THE PARTY, HAS ANNOUNCED HIS INTENTION TO LEAVE WITH

HIS FOLLOWERS AND FORM A NEW GROUP. MANUEL ARAUJO, THE HEAD OF ANOTHER VELASQUISTA SPLINTER GROUP, FOLLOWED THE LIBERALS OUT OF THE FRENTE NACIONAL CONSTITUCIONALISTA.

6. FADI HAD A CLOSED MEETING IN QUITO MARCH 3, APPARENTLY TO DISCUSS POSSIBLE CANDIDACIES OR ALLIANCES. IT SEEMS UNLIKELY, AT THIS POINT, THAT FADI WILL CHOOSE TO RUN ITS OWN TICKET SINCE FEW GIVE IT THE POSSIBILITY OF ACCUMULATING 30,000 SIGNATURES. THE COMMUNIST PARTY, THOUGH LACKING LEGAL STATUS ITSELF, DOES HAVE A MORIBUND COVER ORGANIZATION THAT WAS INCLUDED ON THE LAST LIST OF RECOGNIZED PARTIES. THAT ORGANIZATION COULD BE REVIVED TO CARRY THE PARTY'S ELECTORAL EFFORTS.

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7. SIXTO DURAN-BALLEN, EX-MAYOR OF QUITO AND CANDIDATE OF THE FRENTE NACIONAL CONSTITUCIONALISTA (FNC), CARRIED

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 QUITO 1440

HIS CAMPAIGN TO GUAYAQUIL MARCH 1. WHILE ANNOUNCING HIS INTENTION TO SELECT A COASTAL CITIZEN (AND PROBABLY A GUAYAQUILENO) AS HIS RUNNING MATE, HE ALSO STRONGLY DENIED CHARGES THAT HE IS THE GOE'S EXTRA-OFFICIAL CANDIDATE. DURAN-BALLEN WAS WARMLY RECEIVED AND THE SUBJECT OF GENEROUS PRESS COVERAGE.

8. DURAN-BALLEN'S EFFORTS RECEIVED A POSSIBLE SETBACK WHEN COL. (RETIRED) RAFAEL ARMIJOS, NEWLY ELECTED DIRECTOR OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY, PULLED HIS ORGANIZATION OUT OF THE FNC MARCH 5 SAYING THAT THE FRONT'S PURPOSE (I.E. GIVING A PUSH TO THE RETURN TO CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT AND THE SELECTION OF A JOINT PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEE) HAD BEEN FILLED. ARMIJOS SAID THAT THE CONSERVATIVES WILL CONTINUE TO SUPPORT DURAN-BALLEN, BUT THAT THEY WILL RUN THEIR OWN SLATE IN LOCAL AND CONGRESSIONAL RACES. REPORTS FOLLOWING ARMIJO'S ANNOUNCEMENT, INDICATE THAT ARMIJOS SUBMITTED A LIST OF THREE NAMES TO SIXTO DURAN, INSISTING THAT THE VICE PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEE BE SELECTED FROM AMONG THE THREE. INCLUDED ON THE LIST WAS GUAYAQUIL INDUSTRIALIST LEON FEBRES-CORDERO, WHO RECEIVED ARMIJOS' PERSONAL ENDORSEMENT. RODRIGO SUAREZ TOLD POLCOUNS MARCH 6 THAT ARMIJOS IS NOT DISPOSED TO DEAL WITH THE MINOR PARTIES IN CONFIDENTIAL

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THE FNC AND STRONGLY INSISTED THAT THE VICE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE SHOULD BE IDEOLOGICALLY COMPATIBLE WITH THE CONSERVATIVE SIXTO DURAN-BALLEN. HE SAID THAT INSISTENCE ON THIS POINT WILL PROBABLY DRIVE THE SOCIALISTS OUT OF THE FRONT.

9. COMMENT: FORMER LIBERAL PARTY DIRECTOR PEDRO JOSE ARTETA, A LONG TIME HUERTA RIVAL, TOLD POLCOUNS MARCH 3 THAT ALTHOUGH THE SQUABBLING IN THE LIBERAL PARTY'S PICHINCHA DIRECTORATE AND DEL CASTILLO'S DEFECTION WERE RECEIVING AMPLE PRESS COVERAGE, THE REAL DIVISION WAS MINIMAL. FRANCISCO HUERTA WAS SELECTED AS THE PARTY'S CANDIDATE IN AN OPEN ASSEMBLY. GIVEN HUERTA'S AND ARTETA'S LESS THAN FRIENDLY RELATIONSHIP, WE ARE INCLINED TO GIVE WEIGHT TO ARTETA'S JUDGMENT ON THIS POINT. BUT IT DOES APPEAR THAT CONSIDERABLE MANEUVERING IS STILL TAKING PLACE IN THE LIBERAL PARTY.

10. ARMIJO'S DECISION TO WITHDRAW FROM THE FNC (THAT THE CONSERVATIVES WERE INSTRUMENTAL IN FOUNDING) HAS APPARENTLY EMBARRASSED AND ANGERED FORMER PARTY LEADERSHIP. FORMER NATIONAL DIRECTOR SUAREZ HOLDS THAT SUCH A UNILATERAL MOVE "WAS TYPICAL OF ARMIJOS' MILITARY MIND." BOTH SUAREZ AND EX-IMPARTY PRESIDENT FRANCISCO SALAZAR HAVE MADE IT CLEAR TO REPORTERS -THAT THE DECISION WAS MADE BY ARMIJOS ALONE, AND NOT BY THE COMPLETE PARTY LEADERSHIP.

11. IT IS DIFFICULT TO PREDICT AT THIS POINT WHAT EFFECT THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY'S DEPARTURE FROM THE FNC WILL HAVE ON THE PRESIDENTIAL PROSPECTS OF DURAN-BALLEN. ALTHOUGH MOST POLITICIANS CONCEDE THAT DURAN-BALLEN HAS A GREAT

DEAL OF PERSONAL
APPEAL WITH THE ECUADOREAN ELECTORATE,
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IT WILL BE DIFFICULT TO TRANSLATE THAT APPEAL INTO
VOTES ON JULY 16 WITHOUT A COHERENT CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATION.
DURAN-BALLEN'S CHALLENGE AT THE MOMENT, WE BELIEVE, IS
TO TRANSLATE HIS PERSONAL ATTRACTION AND THE FAVORABLE
IDEOLOGICAL UNITY REPRESENTED BY THE FNC'S MEMBERSHIP
INTO AN EFFECTIVE CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATION. THE DEFECTION
OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY DOES NOT AUGUR WELL FOR THAT
POSSIBILITY. ALSO, IF DURAN SELECTS ANOTHER CENTER-
RIGHTIST AS HIS RUNNING MATE, THE DEFECTION OF THE
SOCIALISTS SEEMS CERTAIN. WITH THEIR DEPARTURE, THE
FNC'S PROJECTED SELF IMAGE AS A GROUP REPRESENTING THE
BROAD IDEOLOGICAL WATERFRONT WOULD COLLAPSE.

12. AT THIS STAGE OF THE CAMPAIGN, IT IS APPARENT THAT
HUERTA AND DURAN ARE THE TWO STRONGEST CANDIDATES AND,
IF ELECTIONS WERE HELD TODAY, THOSE TWO CANDIDATES WOULD
FACE EACH OTHER IN THE SUBSEQUENT RUNOFF. HOW-
EVER, A CLEARER PICTURE WILL NOT BE AVAILABLE UNTIL
IT IS APPARENT WHAT THE CFP OF THE NOW DISQUALIFIED ASSAD
BUCARAM WILL DO WITH ITS CONSIDERABLE POLITICAL
POWER. THAT DEFINITION IS STILL PENDING.
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